



Bar Talk

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January 2025 Luncheon Celebrates the District's *Pro Se* Project and Highlights Opportunities to Get Involved

By Gina Tonn

On January 8, 2025, the Chapter gathered for the first monthly luncheon of the new calendar year, featuring a presentation and panel about the District of Minnesota's Federal *Pro Se* Project.

The Honorable Kate Menendez opened the discussion, sharing that she learned about the *Pro Se* Project after becoming a magistrate judge in the District, and has come to greatly appreciate the importance of representation for *pro se* litigants in civil cases. She then introduced *Pro Se* Project Coordinator Jackie Bailey for an overview on how the Project works and the process of serving as a volunteer attorney.

As shared with luncheon attendees, the *Pro Se* Project was founded in 2009 and is a joint initiative of the United States District Court for the District of Minnesota and the Chapter. Since its inception, more than 1000 cases have been referred to the Project. The goals of the *Pro Se* Project include improving access to justice and decreasing the number of civil *pro se* litigants in the District. The Project provides *pro se* litigants, who are referred to the Project by the Bench, with the opportunity to consult with counsel and, where appropriate, to be fully represented by volunteer attorneys. In addition to referrals for representation in litigation, the Court may refer *pro se* litigants to the Early Settlement Conference Project for consultation on the usefulness of an early settlement conference.

Next, volunteer attorneys Phil Kitzer, Brittany Resch, Zach Schmoll, and Ryan Vettleson shared their personal insights from representing *pro se* litigants through the Project. The panel shared that they have provided various levels of representation in many kinds of matters. For example, representation may be limited in scope, such as assisting a *pro se* litigant with amending a complaint, attending a settlement conference, or just providing a consultation.

The panelists observed that the *Pro Se* Project's benefits are wide-ranging—for clients, the Court, and counsel. Panelists had represented clients in obtaining meaningful settlements, achieving policy changes, and navigating the federal rules. Several themes shone through the panelists' comments, including the importance for *pro se* litigants of making sure they are being heard. And from a professional standpoint, the panelists all agreed that serving as a volunteer attorney affords significant developmental opportunities, especially for newer lawyers.

In addition to the informative overview and panel, the January luncheon provided the Chapter an opportunity to recognize and thank the 2024 *Pro Se* Project volunteer attorneys and participating firms. Thank you to all who are involved in this important effort! If you are interested in volunteering for the *Pro Se* Project, contact *Pro Se* Project Coordinator Jackie Bailey at coordinator@proseproject.org.

Gina Tonn is an attorney at Greene Espel PLLP, representing clients in a variety of complex litigation matters. She clerked for Judge Jane Kelly of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals and Judge John R. Tunheim of the District of Minnesota. Gina is a co-editor of Bar Talk.

Fifth Leadership Summit on Women in the Law

By Emily Egart

The fifth Leadership Summit on Women in the Law was held on Thursday, February 27, 2025, by the District of Minnesota and the Minnesota Chapter of the Federal Bar Association. The event was hosted by Target Corporation and held at Target Commons, a beautiful event space with floor-to-ceiling windows on Nicollet Mall in downtown Minneapolis.

The event was filled with back-to-back panelists and speakers—all women in leadership roles within the Minneapolis/St. Paul legal community, including leaders in corporate counsel offices, law firms, and distinguished women leaders on the bench. Their messages and stories were filled with hope as well as strategies to build a more inclusive legal profession and advance women's leadership in law.

Amy Tu, Executive Vice President and Chief Legal and Compliance Officer at Target, opened the Summit by welcoming event guests and laying the foundation of empowerment and hope that continued throughout the day. Sybil Dunlop, of Greene Espel PLLP, followed Ms. Tu with a parade of statistics illuminating the growth of women's leadership in the legal profession. She demonstrated how women are excelling and achieving results despite a cultural bias built against them—and how far we still have to go.



Keynote Speaker, Minnesota Solicitor General Liz Kramer, expanded on Ms. Dunlop's statistics, showing a pie chart outlining the discrepancy in women leading Minnesota courts. Only a minor slice of the pie represented women, the rest represented men. At the same time, Ms. Kramer noted: "Women of the judiciary are rocking it." She finished her remarks on the judiciary with a call to action for more female representation on the Eight Circuit bench.



Solicitor General Kramer next focused on the women leading the charge in a recent lawsuit filed by multiple Attorneys General against the Trump administration following the abrupt halt of federal grant funding to states. She pointed out that not only are these women leading the charge in this lawsuit, but by doing so, they have opened themselves up to a barrage of threats, emphasizing the bravery and courage these women are showcasing as leaders in the law.

Solicitor General Kramer then pivoted to the defense of civil rights in Minnesota and rounded out her remarks with some tips for advocacy and leadership. Her "Wisdom Pointer #3" was a personal favorite: "Men have credibility automatically; women have to earn and re-earn." She emphasized this specific hurdle women incur on the trajectory to leadership roles in the law, but also encouraged women to take on the challenge.

Solicitor General Kramer wrapped up her remarks by playing what would be her "walk up" song if such a thing existed in the legal profession—Sampa The Great's "Let Me Be Great" featuring Angelique Kidjo. Her final statement, made generally to the legal profession and world, asked folks to live up to their human potential and stop allowing stereotypes to hold them back.

The Summit also held three panel discussions throughout the morning.

The first panel consisted of women in leadership roles in corporate counsel offices: Amy Tu, Target Executive Vice President and Chief Legal and Compliance Officer; Miaja Cassidy, Blue



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Women in the Law, continued from previous page.

Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota Chief Legal Officer; LuAnne Pederson, Senior Vice President, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis; and Karla Robertson, Pentair EVP, General Counsel, Secretary, and Chief Social Responsibility Officer.

The second panel consisted of women in leadership roles within law firms: Gina Kastel, Faegre Drinker partner and Chair; Tara Norgard, Carlson Caspers partner and management committee member; and Keiko Sugisaka, Maslon partner and Board of Directors and Executive Committee Chair.

The third and final panel consisted of three distinguished women leaders on the bench: the Honorable Kate M. Menendez, the Honorable Shannon G. Elkins, and the Honorable Elizabeth Cowan Wright.

All three panels were filled with the panelists' individual and collective experiences and journeys that brought them to the positions they hold now. Empowering women to ask for what they want and make it known to their leaders was the main theme that resonated throughout the panel discussions. Panelists also emphasized the importance of sponsorship and mentorship to assist in one's growth towards leadership. Ms. Robertson (Pentair) expanded on sponsorship and mentorship to include your own personal board of directors—a group of individuals, each with their own niche to support you and your growth (and yes, pets can be board members, particularly for the purposes of emotional support!).



One of the final questions on the judiciary panel was directed at The Honorable Judge Menendez – specifically, what her thoughts are on how the federal judiciary has been brought into spotlight recently. She graciously responded with neutrality and respect for the Constitution and her position as a member of the judicial branch, a self-regulating branch of our government.

The event wrapped up with lunch and discussions at guest tables focusing on how organizations, individual attorneys, legal leaders, and the FBA can advance gender equity in our profession. Guests discussed how mentorship and sponsorship might differ in advancing women attorneys' careers, and what structures organizations can put in place to support this. Attendees left feeling empowered and motivated, something women in the legal profession should feel on a regular basis.

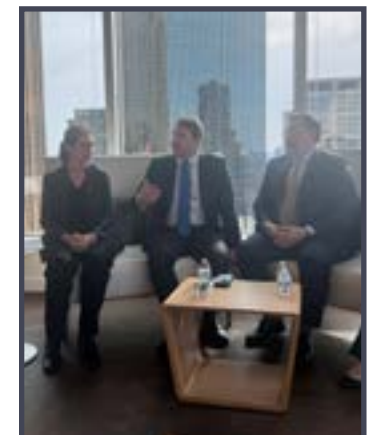
Emily Egart is an associate at Gustafson Gluek PLLC, representing both classes and individual plaintiffs in the areas of consumer protection and antitrust.

White Collar Committee Holds Annual CLE and Social

By Chelsea Walcker

On March 13, 2025, the FBA White Collar Committee hosted its annual CLE and social event at Best & Flanagan LLP. The CLE was moderated by Marie Pacyga, Criminal Defense Attorney at Ryan Pacyga Criminal Defense. The panelists, including the Honorable Shannon Elkins, Kevin Riach, Nicole Engisch, and Matt Forbes, discussed a variety of topics related to white collar criminal prosecution and defense, including maintaining and producing voluminous discovery, engaging in early conversations with opposing counsel, and effective advocacy at bond hearings and sentencing hearings. The event was well attended and all attendees enjoyed socializing after the CLE panel discussion.

Chelsea Walcker is an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Fraud and Public Corruption Section of the U.S. Attorney's Office. She also served as the National Human Trafficking Coordinator at the U.S. Attorney's Office and oversaw initiatives to combat human trafficking. Prior to joining the U.S. Attorney's Office, Walcker was a litigator at Robins Kaplan LLP.



Pro Se Project Volunteer Spotlight – An Interview with Kelly A. Jeanetta

Kelly A. Jeanetta Law Firm, LLC
402 Union Plaza
333 Washington Avenue North
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401
(612) 886-2015
kjeanetta@jeanettalaw.com



Biography

For more than 25 years, I have represented individuals who have experienced discrimination and harassment in employment. I represent clients in state and federal court, at the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (“EEOC”), and at the Minnesota Department of Human Rights. I also provide advice and counsel regarding employment contracts, non-competes, and separation agreements. In addition, I represent unions in grievance arbitrations, provide employer training on employment discrimination and retaliation, conduct discrimination and harassment investigations, and represent individuals who have been denied long-term disability benefits.

I am a Minnesota State Bar Association Certified Specialist in Labor & Employment Law. I am also a certified neutral under Rule 114 of the Minnesota Rules of General Practice.

In 2019, I was honored by the Minnesota Chapter of the National Employment Lawyers Association (“NELA”) with the Karla Wahl Dedicated Advocacy Award. In 2020, I was selected as one of the Minnesota Attorneys of the Year by Minnesota Lawyer, and have been given the designation of “Super Lawyer” for many years.

I had the privilege of being chair of the Minnesota State Bar Association Labor & Employment Section and President of the Minnesota Chapter of NELA.

I was an Adjunct Representation Professor in Lawyering at William Mitchell College of Law (now Mitchell Hamline College of Law) from 2013–2019 as well as an Adjunct Professor in Professional Responsibility at Mitchell Hamline College of Law in 2020 and 2021.

In addition to my work with the *Pro Se* Project, I provide volunteer employment law phone advice for the Volunteer Lawyers Network twice monthly.

How long have you been a volunteer with the *Pro Se* Project?

Since 2011.

Why did you become involved with the *Pro Se* Project?

It is challenging as an attorney to navigate federal court—imagine trying to do so as a *pro se* litigant. It is a privilege to be an attorney and so we owe a duty to volunteer our services whenever possible. Also, losing a job or being denied an opportunity for advancement can be devastating. When the cause of the loss is due to intentional discrimination, it is even more traumatizing. Whether due to actual or perceived discrimination, *pro se* plaintiffs deserve to be treated with compassion and respect. For some *pro se* plaintiffs, meeting with a Project volunteer is the first time they have been given an opportunity to tell their story to an attorney.

What types of cases have you volunteered on?

All the cases on which I’ve volunteered have been related to employment discrimination. By providing meaningful consultation in my area of expertise, I help people gain a better understanding of their case, the burdens they bear in proving that case, and the litigation process itself. I help plaintiffs understand the benefits and value of early resolution and assist them through the early settlement process. Recently, I helped an individual amend her complaint and achieve remand to state court.

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Pro Se Project Spotlight, continued from previous page.

Can you share a memorable experience from your volunteer work with the *Pro Se* Project?

What sticks with me is the gratitude expressed by *pro se* plaintiffs for just listening to them and talking with them about their case. It is a reminder of how inaccessible justice is for many people.

How has volunteering impacted your perspective on access to justice?

Along the lines of the earlier question—we all know that not everyone has access to justice. Also, what constitutes justice is in the eye of the beholder. The *Pro Se* Project helps to level the playing field by giving *pro se* plaintiffs a fair chance to have their cases heard—whether by a *Pro Se* Project volunteer, by the defendant, or by a judge. Regardless of the outcome, there is justice in being heard.

What keeps you coming back?

There is a sense of duty but, also, I enjoy the work. *Pro se* Project plaintiffs are, for the most part, so appreciative. Helping them navigate this complicated area of law makes me feel good!

What advice would you give to a prospective volunteer with the *Pro Se* Project?

Do it!

What do you enjoy outside of the legal profession and volunteering?

I enjoy spending time with my family (including eight grandkids!), hiking, reading, painting, traveling, gardening, and eating good food.

What is one thing you are looking forward to most in 2025?

Going to Ireland.

Interested in volunteering or learning more about the *Pro Se* Project? Please contact:

Jackie Bailey
Coordinator, *Pro Se* Project
(612) 965-3711
Coordinator@proseproject.org

Chapter Members Mingle at Annual Affinity Bar Meet and Greet

By Megan Odom

On March 4, 2025, the Chapter hosted its 11th Annual Affinity Bar Meet and Greet. The event is a partnership between the Chapter’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee and the Affinity Bar Liaison Coordinator. Chapter members gathered with attorneys from Minnesota’s affinity bars and affiliate organizations at Fhima’s in downtown Minneapolis. There was a great turnout, despite the impending snowstorm, and a good time was had by all.



Megan Odom is a partner at Ciresi Conlin LLP, where she represents plaintiffs injured by defective drugs and devices in multi-district litigations (MDLs). Prior to joining the firm, she served as a clerk for Judge Eric C. Tostrud of the U.S. District Court for the District of Minnesota and Justices David Stras and Paul Thissen of the Minnesota Supreme Court. Megan is the Chapter’s Affinity Bar Liaison Coordinator.

Newer Lawyers Committee Hosts Magistrate Judge Lunch and Learn

By Gabrielle M. Kolb

On February 18, the Chapter's Newer Lawyer Committee hosted a luncheon with Magistrate Judge Schultz, Magistrate Judge Micko, and Magistrate Judge Cowan Wright, who shared practical insights into the role of magistrate judges in the District of Minnesota.

The panel noted that many newer lawyers (and perhaps even more experienced lawyers) do not fully grasp the scope of duties of magistrate judges in the District. Indeed, as a newer lawyer myself, I had little knowledge about what exactly our magistrate judges do. Although I understood that magistrate judges help resolve discovery disputes, I was unaware that, if the parties consent, magistrate judges can oversee jury trials. Judge Shultz shared that he has conducted a number of consent trials and highlighted the advantages of having a magistrate judge handle a trial. One advantage that Judge Schultz identified is that parties will be less likely to have their trial delayed if they schedule with a magistrate judge.

Magistrate judges also play a helpful role in settlement conferences. In the District of Minnesota, magistrate judges conduct settlement conferences. Judge Cowan Wright encouraged lawyers to take advantage of the ability to have ex parte conversations with their appointed magistrate judge in the context of a settlement conference. There, lawyers can share insights about their client and case-related issues with the magistrate judge, which allows them to help parties navigate complicated dynamics in the settlement process.

As a newer lawyer, it was helpful to gain a better understanding of the various roles that magistrate judges play in the District of Minnesota. It was also inspiring to hear about how deeply the magistrate judges care about the role the federal judiciary plays in administering justice. Listening to Judges Shultz, Micko, and Cowan Wright reflect on the work that they and their fellow members of the bench do, it was evident that they have a deep respect for their colleagues, and I left the event with an even greater appreciation for the work they do as well.

Gabrielle M. Kolb is an associate at Gustafson Gluek PLLC, representing both classes and individual plaintiffs in the areas of consumer protection and antitrust. Before joining Gustafson, she clerked for Chief Justice Natalie E. Hudson on the Minnesota Supreme Court.

Clerk's Corner

By Andrew Pieper

Announcements

January 17, 2025, marked an incredible anniversary: The 50th anniversary of Judge Donald D. Alsop taking the oath of office and becoming a federal judge!

The General Order on Personal Electronic Devices for Visitors to the District of Minnesota Courthouses has been updated and can be found [here](#). An important change to note: smart glasses must be pouched. The District continues to implement enhanced security days and the best practice is to always carry your Bar card or a picture of your Bar card to expedite your exemption at screening. Chambers have unlocking devices if a member of your party requires access to their device.

The second floor Clerk's Office remodel in Minneapolis began this month, and construction is expected to last until the fall. During construction, the Clerk's Office counter is co-located with the Bankruptcy Clerk's Office counter on the third floor of the Minneapolis courthouse.

District Events

In 2024, the Court naturalized nearly 11,000 new citizens in 41 ceremonies, including ceremonies at Target Field; the Minnesota State Fair; the Minnesota History Museum; colleges and universities in greater Minnesota; the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth federal courthouses; and various community locations. The Court thanks its partners in the executive branch at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and the U.S. Marshals Service for making these ceremonies possible.

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as well as the Social Security Administration and the State Department for providing new Americans information on benefits and passports.

Also in 2024, the Justice & Democracy Center of Minnesota welcomed over 2,200 visitors. The Center continues to add new fieldtrips, workshops, and educational content. Highlights of the previous year include a "sold-out" Girl Scouts Democracy Badge workshop held on Bill of Rights Day, hosting of the Minnesota State High School mock trial championship, and multiple teacher institutes on topics ranging from free speech in the classroom to the 100th anniversary of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.



Join the Court on Thursday, April 3, 2025, from 4:30-6:30pm in the lobby of the Diana E. Murphy U.S. Courthouse in Minneapolis for the next public art installation, Seeds of Justice. Seeds of Justice celebrates Minnesota's unique tradition of crop art while exploring themes of justice, community, and civic engagement and will include the opportunity for attendees to vote on their favorite piece.

Andrew Pieper is the Chief Deputy Clerk for the District of Minnesota.

Bankruptcy Clerk's Corner

By Tricia Pepin

Hello from the U.S. Bankruptcy Court!

The Bankruptcy Court is undergoing many changes in the spring. The Bankruptcy Court will soon say goodbye to two judges: Judge Keshia L. Tanabe and Judge Michael E. Ridgway. Judge Tanabe's last day is March 31, 2025, and Judge Ridgway is retiring, effective May 31, 2025. These departures will impact the Court's case assignments as described below:

Effective April 1, 2025:

Judge Ridgway will no longer be assigned any new cases.

Judge Tanabe's remaining pending caseload will be randomly reassigned to Chief Judge Constantine or Judge Fisher.

All new third and fourth division cases will be randomly reassigned to Chief Judge Constantine or Judge Fisher.

All new sixth division cases will be assigned to Judge Fisher.

Effective June 1, 2025:

Judge Ridgway's remaining pending caseload in the third and fourth divisions will be randomly reassigned to Chief Judge Constantine or Judge Fisher.

Judge Ridgway's remaining pending sixth division caseload will be reassigned to Judge Fisher.

Beginning in March, the Bankruptcy Court will offer online payments for filing and copy fees through the pay.gov platform. A link to make these payments will be available on the Bankruptcy Court's website, www.mnb.uscourts.gov.

For the most current information, please visit the Bankruptcy Court's website at www.mnb.uscourts.gov. For filing assistance, contact the Bankruptcy Clerk's Office by calling 612-664-5200, or emailing helpdesk@mnb.uscourts.gov.

Tricia Pepin is the Clerk of the Bankruptcy Court for the District of Minnesota.

Upcoming Events:

Wednesday, April 9, 2025
April Luncheon

Tuesday, April 15, 2025
*An Antitrust Fireside
Chat with Bill Baer*

Wednesday, April 16, 2025
*IP Odyssey: Navigating
the Latest Developments
in IP Law*

Saturday, May 10, 2025
*2025 Federal Judges'
Dinner Dance*

Wednesday, May 21, 2025
May Luncheon

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Editors-in-Chief

Devin Driscoll

Mary Nikolai

Alyssa Schaefer

Gina Tonn

Bar Talk is the official newsletter of the Minnesota Chapter of the Federal Bar Association, published quarterly by the *Bar Talk* Committee. For any inquiries or article suggestions, please contact **Devin Driscoll** (DDriscoll@fredlaw.com), **Mary Nikolai** (mnikolai@gustafsongluek.com), **Alyssa Schaefer** (schaefer.alyssa@dorsey.com), and **Gina Tonn** (GTonn@greeneespel.com). A special thank you to **Allegra Print & Imaging** for formatting this issue.

Want to get involved in the Minnesota Chapter of the Federal Bar Association? Visit www.mnfedbar.org/initiatives for a full list of committees and information about how to get involved.

Online Registration:

The Minnesota Chapter of the FBA utilizes an online registration system for the monthly Minneapolis Club luncheons. A registration link will be sent to you via e-mail for each luncheon. One feature of the system is the automatic calendar entry; just click "Add to Calendar" from the registration system or your confirmation e-mail. Registration coordinators have the option to register multiple attendees in a single registration.

CLE Credit for Monthly Luncheons:

Attending the Monthly Luncheons also earns you CLE credits! If you attended these luncheons, here are the CLE codes and the credits approved:

January Monthly Luncheon - .75 Credits (523043)



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